Plant Fact Sheet
Thin Paspalum
(*Paspalum setaceum)*

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INTRODUCTION

Thin paspalum (*Paspalum setaceum*) is a short-lived, warm-season, tufted, perennial grass that grows 2 ½ to 3 feet tall (Hatch, Schuster, & Drawe, 1999). The base of the plant is knotty and has short rhizomes (Correll & Johnson, 1996). It is a member of the *Paniceae* tribe of the grass family (Hitchcock, 1971). There are four varieties of *Paspalum setaceum*: *setaceum, stramineum, muhlenbergii,* and *ciliatifolium* (Gould, 1975). The varieties are not recognized by all plant authorities (USDA-NRCS, 1994).

Paspalum setaceum var. *setaceum* (previously *P. debile*) is identified by some plant authorities as thin paspalum (Gould, 1975). Others recognize the varieties, but consider thin paspalum to be *Paspalum setaceum,* a separate entity from the other varieties (Hatch, Schuster, and Drawe, 1999). Still others see thin paspalum as the whole *Paspalum setaceum* complex, and do not recognize the individual varieties at all (USDA-NRCS, 1994). The varieties will be discussed herein because they are recognized by the most recent authority: (Hatch, Schuster, and Drawe, (1999).

The variety *setaceum* (previously *P. debile,* which Gould (1975) calls thin paspalum*)* can be differentiated from the other varieties as having narrower leaf blades, shorter spikelets, and gray-green herbage (Gould, 1975).

The variety *stramineum* (previously P*. stramineum*) is distinguished from the other varieties by narrower leaf blades and yellow-green foliage (Hatch, Schuster, and Drawe, 1999).

The variety *muhlenbergii* (previously P*. muhlenbergii* and P*. pubescens*) has light to dark green, pilose leaf blades and is distinguished by a conspicuous midvein on the lower floret (Hatch, Schuster, & Drawe, 1999).

Finally, the variety *ciliatifolium* (previously *P. ciliatifolium* and *P. propinquum*) is recognized by its glabrous dark green to purplish herbage. It is commonly called fringeleaf paspalum (Gould, 1975).

It is important to note that populations of widely variable, but intergrading plant types are included in the *Paspalum setaceum* complex (Hitchcock, 1971).

ADAPTED AREA

Thin paspalum is found along the Atlantic Coast from Massachusetts to Florida, along the Gulf Coast to Texas and south into Mexico, and also found inland in Ohio, West Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee (Hitchcock, 1971). In Texas, it can be found throughout most of the state, but is rare in the Edwards Plateau and Trans-Pecos regions. It is most common in East, and Southeast Texas, and the Coastal portions of the Rio Grande Plains (Correll & Johnson, 1996).

The variety *setaceum* has a similar distribution, but can also be found in Cuba (Hitchcock. 1971). The variety *stramineum* has a wider distribution. It grows from Massachusetts west to Minnesota, south to Florida, Texas and Eastern Arizona, down the gulf coast as far as Panama, and can be found in the West Indies and Caribbean Islands as well. (Gould, 1975). This is the most common variety in Texas (Correll & Johnston).

The variety *muhlenbergii* is found from the Atlantic Coast west to Iowa and south to Texas (Gould, 1975). It is common in Northeast Texas (Correll & Johnston, 1996). The variety *ciliatifolium* is found mostly at inland sites from New Jersey to Florida, west to Oklahoma and Texas, and in the West Indies. In Texas it is found in the Pineywoods, Post Oak Savannah, and Coastal Plains regions, but not on the immediate coast and rarely farther south than Harris County (Gould, 1975).

All the varieties prefer sandy soils (Hitchcock, 1971), but will grow in other soil types (Hatch, Schuster, & Drawe, 1999). Plants are typically found in open woods, open ground, in old fields, in ditches, and along wood borders (Gould, 1975).

USES

In Texas, the *Paspalum setaceum* complex provides fair quality livestock forage. It also has low forage value for deer. Birds will eat the seed; however, low seed production makes its use by them limited (Hatch, Schuster, & Drawe, 1999). Thin paspalum can also be used in native site restoration. It is considered an indicator of medium range condition for the Edwards Plateau (Nelle, 1999). However, limited seed production will make it impractical for use in larger projects.

ESTABLISHMENT

Thin paspalum can be best reproduced from seed. However, germination testing at the Plant Materials Center yielded only an average germination of five percent.

MANAGEMENT

Thin paspalum does not require much management. A seed increase plot of thin paspalum growing at the Plant Materials Center has shown itself to be relatively drought hardy.

REFERENCES

Correll, D. S., and Johnston, M.C., (1996). *Manual of the Vascular Plants of Texas.* Richardson, TX: The University of Texas at Dallas

Gould, F. W. (1975). *The Grasses of Texas*. College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press.

Hatch, S. L., Schuster, J. L., and Drawe, D. L. (1999). *Grasses of the Texas Gulf Prairies and Marshes.* College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press.

Hitchcock, A. S. (1971). *Manual of the Grasses of the United States, Volumes 1&2, 2nd Edition*. Revised by Agnes Chase. New York: Dover Publications.

Nelle, S. (1999). Evaluating rangeland and deer habitat in the Edwards Plateau. *Grass Roots: Newsletter for the Texas Section of the Society for Range Management,* v. 50 (5), pp. 3-4.

USDA-NRCS (1994). *Plants: Alphabetical Listing of Scientific Names.* Baton Rouge, LA: United States Department of Agriculture.

WHERE TO GET HELP

Contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service (formerly Soil Conservation Service) office for more information. Look in the phone book under "United States Government". The Natural Resources Conservation Service will be listed under the subheading "Department of Agriculture."